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ARNI'S ADDENDUM

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"What I Have Learned" Blog

For this issue of Arni's Addendum, I wanted to share some inspiration from national colleagues drawn from "Barry's Blog" in his "What I Have Learned" series. The author is Barry Hessenius, the former director of the California Arts Council.

I have excerpted his post due to space restrictions, but have included several that I found of particular relevance to us here in Montana. Thought it was a great way to close out the year!

Thanks to Barry for coming up with this sterling idea! To subscribe to Barry's Blog, go to blog.westaf.org.

— Arni Fishbaugh

The "What I Have Learned" Blog

Posted Sept. 30, 2012

I have been thinking lately about what I have learned over the past 15 years that I have been involved in the nonprofit arts field; about the lessons driven home by experience and time, and how little I really knew, or understood, when I first started in this fascinating, yet relentlessly challenging, arena.

I have been wondering what are the basic lessons that I have learned that, were someone to ask, I might pass on (particularly to those coming up behind me). What might I say that would be helpful to the next generation of leaders (or to anyone really) and that might save them time and heartache?

Could I synthesize it into a couple of pieces of advice? Would it make any sense?

And that got me to thinking about how much more others across the field have probably learned over their long tenures working in our sector than I have. So I thought I would do a blog on that. The "What I Have Learned" blog.

I invited 24 colleagues to share the most important lessons they have learned; to pass on some of the knowledge that they might wish someone had shared with them when they were still coming up through the ranks.

Specifically, I asked:

What have you learned that you can pass on to the future leaders of our field? What one or two big pieces of advice can you give based on your experience that you think would most help our future leaders in their career development and in doing their jobs well? Here then are some of their responses:

Randy Cohen, Vice President of Research and Policy, Americans for the Arts:

1. One person can start a movement. In tough economic times, no pushback from the arts community is low-hanging fruit for budget cutters. Pack your city council chambers with supporters and incorporate our secret weapon – arts, music, and poetry. It will be a public hearing nobody will forget.

2. Great leaders are great advocates – for their industry and for themselves. Advocacy can be boiled down to three questions: What's the message? Who gets the message? Who delivers the message?

3. Inspired audiences will take action. Be a great speaker. Data alone won't cut it ... add a story to bring the message alive. Practice, be yourself, use humor, and go easy on the PowerPoint text.

4. You can do a bounty of good if you are willing to share leadership and credit. Everyone wants to be on the team that is doing the right thing.

5. Change is a constant condition. When faced with multiple choices, lean towards the one you fear most – that is usually where the greatest treasure is buried. Be brave!

6. We are in the people business. Help others get what they need, and others will help you get what you need. Don't forget what Mom told you: say please and thank you, be on time.

7. Learning never ends. Fuel your brain with industry knowledge with the vigor of a squirrel gathering nuts for winter.

8. There is much to be grateful for. Start the day writing a couple short thank you notes. Go old school ... pen, paper, stamped envelope.

9. When on the road, drink lots of water, don't eat too many cookies, and carry your presentation materials with you.

10. Folks love Top 10 lists.

Michael Alexander, Executive Director, Grand Performances:

"When the sea rises, all ships rise with it." Devote part of your work time and your personal life to the causes that will benefit our field and our world. Your professional life and

One person can start a movement.

In tough economic times, no pushback from the arts community is low-hanging fruit for budget cutters.

— Randy Cohen, Americans for the Arts

your personal life will benefit in the process.

My most important role models in the arts each practiced this providing leadership by devoting time and resources to our field. I hope I can make a fraction of the impact that they made.

"To be interesting, be interested." Former CAC member Fred Sands said he told that to all his employees. I think it is worthwhile for all of us to listen more and talk less. And listen everywhere. Our audiences have remarkable wisdom – even the children. Ask good questions.

Remember too that different communities have different ways of addressing challenges. "Don't sacrifice the good while waiting for

the perfect." Don't let analysis paralysis stop forward motion. Recognize that there are many right answers.

"You cannot be leader unless you challenge people to do something." I heard that line in the animated film "Chicago 10" when one of the activists told a colleague why he was not a leader.

"Quick, cheap and good – pick two." Mid-size nonprofits don't have the luxury of deep pockets enabling them to throw money at problems. And mid-size nonprofits don't want to settle for anything less than good. So that means we need to give ourselves adequate time to plan, prepare, recruit, manage and assess the many projects we undertake.

Robert Booker, Executive Director, Arizona Commission on the Arts: Know that your work life and personal life will blend at times, and find a way to manage that mix in a healthy way. Develop a positive balance between your personal principles/goals and your professional responsibilities/challenges. Remember that all work worth doing is worth doing well.

Celebrate your successes and those of others every moment you can. Have fun every day and when you can't find joy in your work ... find another job.

Always accept new responsibilities in your current position. Don't expect an immediate reward for expanding your workload or pitching in to cover a position. In the end, you will be more knowledgeable about your organization and will be recognized as a leader and team player. The rewards will come later in your career with your organization, others and the field.

Remember to give credit to your teammates when they have worked on a project or supported your action with their skills and send handwritten notes to folks that help you every day along the road. Help others reach their goals when you can. Never speak ill about people you work with.

Learn the history of the non-profit and for-profit arts industry. Be familiar with the successes and the challenges our field has faced over the years. Learn from the work your colleagues are doing in other communi-

ties and countries. Serve the people you see outside your window.

Treat money as if it were time and time as if it were money ... you can always make more money, but time is fleeting. Try to give back as much as you get as you work in this field. Always tell the truth.

Take responsibility for your actions and don't fear failure.

Have a GREAT week. Don't Quit.

— Barry

STATE OF THE ARTS

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The Cultural and Aesthetics Advisory Committee was hard at work during a recent review of the FY14-15 Cultural Trust grant applications. Shown here (back row, left to right): Laura McCann, Ed Noonan, Bob Valach, Surale Phillips, Jon Axline, Peter Rudd, Benjamin Clark, Sean Chandler and Penny Redli. Front row: Mark Ratledge, Ann Cogswell, Anne Grant, Diane Sands, Elizabeth Guheen and Ken Egan.